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SUBJECT: A PIOUS CHAVEZ CALLS FOR ANTI-U.S. UNITY ON
AL-JAZEERA

REF: STATE 3826

Classified By: Stephen McFarland, Deputy Chief of Mission,
for Reasons 1.4(d).

Summary

1. (C) Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez told an Al-Jazeera interviewer December 3 that the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were "more horrendous terrorism" than the terrorist acts they were intended to combat. Speaking in a televised interview from Doha, Qatar, Chavez called for world solidarity against U.S. imperialism. He spoke of his vision for a South American union as a means to bring about a "multi-polar" and "balanced" world. Chavez said his Bolivarian Revolution is a new attempt at achieving socialism, which had been misapplied in the Soviet Union. Throughout the interview, Chavez quoted the Bible and made multiple references to his Christian faith. Chavez is shopping around his "multi-polar world" foreign policy, which seemed well received by the Al-Jazeera interviewer. End summary.

Chavez Rips U.S. "Terrorism" in Iraq, Afghanistan

2. (C) Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez gave an interview on Al-Jazeera television on December 3 during a stopover in Qatar. The interviewer praised Chavez for "caring about the poor and downtrodden" and for defying the United States. Chavez said confrontation with the United States is inevitable when a country tries to wipe out poverty. Asked about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Chavez said it was the wrong way to fight terrorism. The U.S. had, he asserted, engaged in a "more horrendous terrorism" by dropping bombs on "innocent children, women, men, and entire families." He expressed solidarity with the people of Iraq and said they have a right to confront the United States. He repeated accusations that the USG tried to overthrow him in April 2002, but was unsuccessful because Venezuelans were armed and ready to defend their sovereignty and revolution.

Regions Must Unite Against U.S. Power

3. (U) Chavez said that, in the face of the imperialist power of the U.S., the world has no choice but to unite. A united Africa, South America, and Europe, what he calls "the multi-polar world," can gather enough economic and political force to offset U.S. power, according to Chavez. On Arab unity, Chavez declined to give advice other than it is a question to be settled by sovereign nations. Chavez highlighted South America as a region on the verge of a new era. He called for the creation of a South American Union, which he said would encompass a new civilization that rivals the Middle East for natural resources. He said the South American Union is the fulfillment of the dream of Simon Bolivar that would bring about "a balanced world." He also asserted that the multipolar world will guarantee that the 21st Century will be a "century of peace and will provide the opportunity for people to live as brothers and sons of the same God." (Note: Chavez and other South American leaders signed a declaration on December 9 to create a South American Community of Nations.)

Socialism Is Alive and Kicking

4. (U) Acknowledging his intent to go "the opposite direction" from market-oriented economic policies, Chavez offered socialism as an alternative. The Soviet Union fell, he said, because Stalin and Lenin distorted the model. Neo-liberal policies that are now dominant in the world will one day threaten life on earth, he said, and take it into "the fifth hell." He said he uses oil in his "offensive war" against neo-liberalism by signing energy agreements with

"peoples who need our assistance." Chavez said his revolution was in the process of collecting new ideas for an advanced phase of enlightened thinking, noting that the

Bolivarian project aims to place the human being at the top of its priorities. He cited Fidel Castro's endorsement of Bolivarianism, which Castro called a "struggle for social justice and equality and the full freedom of man."

Chavez Gets Preachy

15. (C) Throughout the interview, Chavez cited morality as the basis for his world struggle. He described his revolution as an attempt to wipe out spiritual and cultural poverty, and to restore peoples' love of country. He said the love with which Venezuelans work for the revolution is so immense that it drives out fear of U.S. imperialism. In characterizing his fears, Chavez quoted Simon Bolivar, "our spiritual and eternal guide," as saying he always feared the power of God, or whatever you care to call him. Chavez made multiple references to his Christian faith, the Bible and to Jesus Christ. He said his revolution is based on fighting poverty, which was the path of "the Savior Jesus Christ." Invoking Castro again, Chavez said the Cuban leader had told him he could call his revolution anything he wanted: socialism, Bolivarianism, or Christianity.

Exaggerated Successes

16. (C) Chavez hailed his revolutionary successes in Venezuela with some embellishment. He claimed to have wiped out illiteracy, breaking a 300-year cycle of poverty. He said 15 million Venezuelans (out of a population of approximately 24 million) currently receive free health care, thanks to the assistance of Cuban doctors. He asserted that some 10 million Venezuelans are fed via government food programs. The interviewer complimented Chavez for "lifting millions of people" out of poverty in Venezuela.

Comment

17. (C) Chavez was trying to play the statesman and project an idealized version of his revolution internationally. Even in the friendly environment of Al-Jazeera, Chavez resisted leading by the interviewer to elicit even harsher attacks against the U.S. While Chavez routinely makes religious references, this interview went to new heights. Chavez no doubt understood his Muslim audience and was trying to come off as "People of the Book."

18. (C) Chavez is a shrewd politician and a skilled communicator. While his message was crafted so as to appeal to his audience, the principal elements of that message have been in place for years for those willing to listen to his speeches:

- the inequality and immorality of the United States' international role;
- the immorality and illegality of USG policy in the Middle East and in the global war on terrorism;
- the need for a new, multi-polar world that can balance the USG; and
- the existence of a government in Venezuela as a model of "anti-imperialism" and of Chavez as a significant regional obstacle to the USG.

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